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A HARD PENANCE
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By Walter Joseph Delaney
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"On this of all days!" sighed John Pembroke, manager of the antiquarian bookshop of William Abercrombie.

He had looked forward to this day as a red letter one in the calendar—as the day, in fact, when he was to ask his circumspect, hard-headed employer for the hand of his daughter, Jessie, whom he had loved in secret ever since he had secured his present position and had surreptitiously courted for the past six months.

Mr. Abercrombie had been away for two weeks inspecting a famous private library which a client wished to buy. He had left John in full charge of the bookshop. Business had been good and John felt proud over it and had counted on his report placing his gruff, practical-minded employer in good humor. Then he intended to tell him outright that Jessie and he were engaged.

Late the evening previous, however, John had received a note from Jessie that disturbed him and completely discouraged all his ambitious plans. It ran:

"I don't know why, but papa is in a dreadful temper. It is something about the old Spectator set of books you bought."

And now John worried and chilled, and tried to guess out where he could possibly have been wrong in the purchase in question, as he was summoned to the private office of his employer.

Mr. Abercrombie's brow was like a thundercloud. He had the Spectator set in question on his desk. As John entered he pointed at the volumes with an angry, stabbing finger.

"You bought that trash I understand?" he growled out.

"Why yes, sir," admitted John.

"And paid \$600 for it?"

"That was the price, sir."

"Well, you have been swindled. The set is a copy—a rank forgery. To an old expert like myself such a barefaced imposition seems impossible. I have just this to say: The set would not sell for \$10 and I shall expect you to make up my money you have so recklessly squandered."

John's heart sank fast and deep. He knew that discussion was useless. Six hundred dollars! Why, even if the old man favored his suit concerning



He Gave His Name as Prof. Marsh.

Jessie that would put off all idea of a speedy wedding.

"I beg to say," began John, but the old man waved all explanations aside.

John could have reminded him that a standing order had been with the house for the very set in question. The books looked genuine. John had even submitted them to a very good authority. The dictum of his employer, however, was final.

"It should be a lesson to you," observed the old man gruffly. "It would be a very wise and shrewd man who